

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, ECON, CA
SUBJ: TRUDEAU PRESS CONFERENCE

1. SUMMARY: IN FIRST OF SCHEDULED WEEKLY NEWS CONFERENCES ON DECEMBER 23, TRUDEAU ANSWERED VARIETY OF QUESTIONS, MOST OF WHICH PREDICTABLY DEALT WITH QUEBEC SEPARATIST THREAT. PRIME MINISTER ELABORATED ON THEME THAT IT IS NO JUST UP TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO SAVE THE COUNTRY, BUT IT IS UP TO ALL CANADIANS. HE ARGUED THAT ECONOMIC CONTROLS ARE WORKING AND THAT THEY CAN BE LIFTED BEFORE EXPIRY DATE OF DECEMBER 1978 IF CANADIANS CONTINUE TO EXERCISE SELF-DISCIPLINE. ON TIMING OF NEXT ELECTIONS, TRUDEAU INDICATED THAT HE HAS NO DATE IN MIND NOW, BUT HE COULD SEE A CASE FOR EARLY ELECTIONS IF GREAT UNCERTAINTY OVER QUEBEC EMERGED. END SUMMARY.

2. QUEBEC: IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON STRATEGY TO COUNTER THREAT OF SEPARATISM, TRUDEAU DWELT ON THEME THAT QUEBECKERS MUST BE CONVINCED THEY ARE BETTER OFF IN CANADA THAN IN AN INDEPENDENT QUEBEC AND THAT THIS TASK IS NOT ONLY ONE FOR LIBERAL GOVERNMENT BUT ALSO ONE FOR PROVINCES, BUSINESS
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CORPORATIONS, MEDIA, UNIVERSITY PEOPLE, AND INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS, ETC. HE QUALIFIED SOMEWHAT HIS PREVIOUSLY ASSERTION THAT HE WOULD NOT USE MILITARY FORCE TO KEEP QUEBEC IN CONFEDERATION BY SAYING HE WOULD RESORT TO SUCH FORCE "IF SOME MINORITY ATTEMPTED TO TAKE A REGION OR PROVINCE OUT OF

CONFEDERATION WITHOUT POPULAR DEMOCRATIC CONSENT."
IF LEVESQUE HAS IN MIND WAITING THREE OR FOUR YEAR
BEFORE HOLDING A REFERENDUM, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID,
HE WILL ONLY PROLONG PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY IN QUEBEC,
AND IT WILL NOT BE AS EASY AS HE PRETENDS TO PERSUADE
QUEBECKERS TO VOTE FOR SEPARATISM. TRUDEAU ALSO
ADMITTED THAT WILL OF QUEBECKERS TO LIVE IN CANADA
HAS BEEN ERODED BY SERIES OF INCIDENTS OVER A
GENERATION, THE LATEST SIGNIFICANT ONE OF WHICH WAS
THE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS AND PILOTS STRIKE.

3. ELECTIONS: APART FROM LOOSING SUPPORT OF
COMMONS THROUGH LIBERAL PARTY DEFECTIONS, WHICH
HE CONSIDERS UNLIKELY, TRUDEAU SAID HE SEES NO
EVENTUALITY WHICH WOULD LEAD HIM TO CALL EARLY
ELECTIONS AND HE HAS NOW NO INTENTION OF HOLDING
THEM BEFORE NORMAL DATE. HE SUBSEQUENTLY QUALIFIED
THIS REMARK BY STATING "THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES
WHERE I WOULD OPT FOR AN ELECTION EARLIER
AND CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE I WOULD TRY TO FINESSE
MR. LEVESQUE'S REFERENDUM, IF HE IS HAVING ONE,
BY GOING LATER."

4. ECONOMIC CONTROLS: TRUDEAU ARGUED FORCEFULLY THAT
CONTROLS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN BRINGING DOWN RATE
OF INFLATION AND THAT CANADIANS HAVE BEGUN TO SHOW
A SENSE OF "ECONOMIC" DISCIPLINE. IF THIS SENSE
CONTINUE, HE SAID, AND "IF IT IS INSTITUTIONALIZED
BY WAY OF AGREEMENTS, SOCIAL CONTRACTS, THE COLLECTIVE
EXPRESSIONS OF WILL, THEN WE WILL NOT NEED THE STATE
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APPARATUS TO IMPOSE LIMITS ON PEOPLE.

5. COMMENT: THERE WAS ESSENTIALLY NOTHING NEW IN
WHAT TRUDEAU TOLD THE PRESS ON QUEBEC, BUT HE DID
DWELL MORE EXTENSIVELY THAN PREVIOUSLY ON CONCEPT THAT
ALL CANADIANS MUST WORK TO CONVINCE QUEBECKERS THEIR
INTEREST LIES IN REMAINING IN CONFEDERATION. YET,
WHEN EXAMINED CLOSELY, THERE WERE NO REAL SPECIFICS
IN HIS REMARKS ON WHAT INITIATIVES FEDERAL GOVERNMENT,
PRIVATE CITIZENS, MEDIA, ETC. MIGHT TAKE TO CONVINCE
QUEBECKERS. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, A GENERAL NOTE
OF CALMNESS AND EVEN OPTIMISM IN HIS COMMENTS ABOUT
QUEBEC AND, PARTICULARLY, ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR HOLDING
COUNTRY TOGETHER. TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE
WILL BE POUCHED TO EUR/CAN.
ENDERS

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